



Photo by PO3 Joshua Ward

By Carl Frank

One of the biggest hazards Marines face is the “we’ve always done it that way” syndrome. Are you part of the problem? Have you ever modified a simple or complex procedure without approval?

Procedure changes are required for several reasons; as techniques are refined, new tools and equipment are fielded. However, procedural shortcuts simply to speed things up can lead to disaster.

- Have you performed a procedure based on hearsay that “we’ve always done it this way” instead of checking the SOP, or technical manual?
- Have you taught a procedure based primarily on your experience, vice the SOP or manual?
- Have you observed someone shortcut procedures and said nothing?

If you answered “yes” to any of these questions, you’re human. You’re also guilty! Unless identified, this pattern of behavior results in dangerous, “new and improved” procedures. The more times Marines get away with the “new way,” the more they are encouraged to develop other shortcuts.

This problem continues, even as Marines transfer and new ones check in. The new Marines are spun up on the “this is how we do it in the fleet.”

Unit SOPs can also be a problem since, by nature, they are *based* on more detailed manuals. When was the last time you compared the abbreviated procedures in your SOP to the detailed ones in the technical manual?

Unfortunately, this process goes unchecked until a Marine is injured or killed. The resulting investigation then finds these “new methods” are the opposite of what is found in technical and field manuals. As the differences come to light, someone usually mentions, “We didn’t change anything; we’ve always done it that way.”

Say you mow your lawn with a power mower. You start out wearing steel-toe safety shoes, but they wear out, and you don’t want to spend the money to buy new ones. Since you’ve never had your foot stuck under the mower in the past, you figure, “Why waste money buying expensive boots that experience has shown aren’t necessary?” You decide to wear plain leather boots while mowing the lawn.

One day, when you can’t find your leather boots, you wear tennis shoes—they are lighter and more comfortable, so you’ll be able to mow even faster. That’s the day, you slip and your foot goes underneath the mower. ☹️